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SANTA CLAUS BROUGHT VINITA A LAND OFFICE AND PROSPERITY

The President and the Indian

Rich Opportunity for the Red Man

By J. M. OSKISON

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S word about the Indians in his message to Congress is an exceedingly intelligent one. In the necessarily limited space at command for a discussion of their affairs he hints at an unusual familiarity with Indian needs and a wise sympathy for their shortcomings. He has an intimate first hand knowledge of them; as a young man he was made a special commissioner to visit and report upon a number of Indian schools in the Middle West; as a rancher he lived in neighborly proximity to some of the reservations; as a soldier he recruited a considerable part of his regiment from among them; and, as governor of New York he took up the problem insofar as it related to those tribes whose reservations are within that state.

"In portions of the Indian Territory," says President Roosevelt, "the mixture of blood has gone on at the same time with progress in wealth and education, so that there are plenty of men with varying degrees of purity of Indian blood who are absolutely indistinguishable in point of social, political and economic ability from their white associates." There the problem is working itself out in an interesting way; and there the government has labored long to make the transition from tribal superstition and prejudice to national citizenship as smooth as possible.

As early as 1893, when the Dawes Commission was created to treat with the Five Tribes, the proportion of white residents to Indians, even including those by adoption and of the thinnest dilution of Indian blood, was greater than two to one. These aliens, having no standing under tribal tradition, had begun to complain of the crudity and inefficiency of Indian courts. They besought the protection of the United States court, and one was established at Muskogee. Under the new arrangement all matters in dispute between citizens and non-citizens had to be taken to this newly created District Court.

Then the question began to be agitated by the lawyers who looked in to get their share of business at the new court—and the movement had substantial backing in the tribes—or abandoning entirely the Indian courts, and extending the jurisdiction of the United States tribunal over all Indians and citizens. Naturally, there was much opposition from the full-bloods and the Indian lawyers. That was a long fight, but was won in 1898 by the inevitable winners, those who favored the position of Indian courts. In a surprisingly short time, the new system was working smoothly. The memory of the tribal courts and the Indian lawyer took up its practice in the new court successfully.

Meanwhile the commission from Washington was working in the territory, going from tribe to tribe, making objections and urging the giving up of tribal organizations. Why not, they asked, in substance, "give up the pretense of government and allot your lands, and in Oklahoma and become a territory until such time as you are ready for statehood?" The answer was that were short decided: "For country better to be, and we don't want to see any change in our method of living." Partially the commission pointed out that the tribes were wrong in thinking they could do to themselves, holding rich territory unproductive—that

white homeseekers would be glad to use. It was manifestly unfair, they said, to tie up from 160 acres of land for every man, woman and child of Indian blood or citizenship, when a whole white family might live on a single share. At the same time it was pointed out that the whites were pouring into the country, willy nilly, and, as lessees or citizens, using the greater part of the land.

Year after year the commission went about from town to town among the tribes, arguing and explaining. But nothing seemed likely to come of their efforts, through the persistent purpose of the government was revealed. Then, in response to urging from Washington, the commission stated plainly that the tribes must come to some agreement, as the government had determined to end their existence, as separate and utterly anomalous political organizations.

Following this informal package, the more hot-headed among the native leaders talked somewhat valiantly of armed opposition, hinting at possible martyrdom to ancient rights. A certain Cherokee secret society was credited with the actual beginning of the arming and organizing of a resisting force.

The magnitude of the work ahead of them may well have caused impatience among the commission's members. In a review of the work recently published, this adjusting commission spoke of the task in this way:

"Instead of an arid Western plain, occupied by the savage of tradition, as many suppose, the commission found a territory not greatly smaller than the state of Maine, rich in mineral and agricultural resources and invaluable timber; a country which has been occupied and cultivated for over half a century, whose fertile valleys yielded bountiful harvests of southern products, and on whose prairies grazed a quarter of a million cattle yearly; where cities had sprung up; through which railroads had been constructed; and where five distinct modern governments existed, independent of the sovereignty of the United States.

"For diversity, the social and political conditions found here were unexampled. Thousands of white children without the means of educational advantages; yet no one of the nations without an institution of learning that would have been a credit to a more advanced civilization; men of Indian blood, whose genius would have adorned the halls of Congress or challenged admiration in the business world—high-minded, able and politic; and within the tribes, in no small numbers, those who, when in normal conditions, had scarcely sufficient intelligence to realize or express the ordinary wants of man."

So it was throughout—saintly women and God-fearing, honest men knocking elbows with the worst criminals in the whole world. Intense industrial activity was found bordering upon utter indolence and primitive make-shift. For the last half dozen years Ardmore, a town in the Chickasaw Nation, has been known as the greatest primary cotton market in the United States. This means that more cotton is hauled there in wagons than to any other town. During this same period some of the worst gangs of outlaws that ever ravaged a country have found refuge in that nation.

Vinita, in the Cherokee Nation,

has long been one of the country's leading cattle shipping towns, and its neighbor, Claremore, forty miles west, called a statehood convention for Dec. 3 this year. In that same Cherokee country, hidden in the rough, flat hills that border Arkansas, live full-bloods who cannot talk English and who still gain a precarious livelihood by hunting.

From 1893 to 1902 the commission has labored. Its members have seen the Indian population in the Territory rise to a total of more than 80,000, while more than 350,000 whites have settled within its boundaries. In 1898 the Choctaws and Chickasaws concluded a treaty with the commission, a year after the small Seminole Nation had treated. In August, 1902, the Cherokees and Creeks finally agreed to give up tribal existence as soon as the details of allotment and rearrangement could be completed.

The commission's work, however, is by no means completed. Pending questions remain to be settled. A work of great magnitude that is not yet finished is the making up of the tribal rolls. Here have been met fraud, ignorance and hindrances. Citizenship has come to have a tangible commercial value, where a citizen is likely to come into possession of from 100 to 500 acres of land, and those whites who have long been settled in the Territory are reluctant to depart. Some of them have brazenly claimed citizenship and have attempted to prove it. The freed slaves of Indians were given citizenship in the tribes after the civil war, and now some hundreds of negroes are trying hard to prove that their parents were freedmen under the citizenship provision.

Besides this, there are grave matters connected with the establishment of a territorial government to be established. What shall be done with the valuable coal and asphalt deposits now held and leased by the tribes acting as commercial organizations? What embargo shall be laid on the sale of the lands when they are transferred to the individual owners? How are the school and taxation systems to be rearranged to serve both Indians and whites to best advantage? Supposing the Indian Territory and Oklahoma to be included in one territory, how are the peculiar needs of those who still live in the old full-blood style to be met? And where is the seat of territorial government to be established? Will the imposition of a territorial government at the present time result in forcing these tribes toward United States citizenship too fast; and, result, as the President has wisely warned, in preventing their going forward at all?

The leaven of education is spreading among the tribes. Graduates of the great government schools, and mixed bloods who have penetrated to the universities are taking their places as leaders in the movement toward amalgamation. Born to the Indian prejudice against white influence and ways, then trained to see the point of view of the whites in their colleges and universities, these men are standing by eager to help forward any movement that tends to advance their people toward economic independence. To them the president looks for material aid and practical suggestions. The time is past when the Carlisle graduate is permitted to go back to his people and discard his sack suit, derby hat and patent leathers for the blanket, leathers and moccasins.

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is just about here

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Lost or Stolen.

One imitation leather telescope, 10 x16, at Katy depot on the morning of Dec. 23, 1902. Contents: one Webster dictionary with a little brown back book on inside marked on back "Maps Said," "Department of the Interior." One pair black trousers, brown leggings, patent leather shoes brand "Edwin Clapp," shirts, collars, cuffs, etc. \$5 reward for telescope and contents. Address W. L. MARTIN, Townsley Clerk, Muskogee, Ind. Ter. d68

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